



PRESS RELEASE
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For Immediate Release

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U.S. COAST GUARD MAKES TWO PANAMA EXPRESS COCAINE SEIZURES

U.S. Attorney Paul I. Perez announced today the unsealing of two Indictments upon the arrival in Tampa of twenty-two individuals to face federal cocaine smuggling charges. The individuals were detained by the United States Coast Guard on two separate maritime interdictions in the Eastern Pacific last month. On February 27, 2004, in international waters in the Eastern Pacific ocean, the Coast Guard apprehended eight individuals aboard the Colombian fishing vessel "San Juanero". On February 21, 2004, eight individuals aboard the fishing vessel "Don Isaac" were interdicted along with six individuals and two go-fast boats. The United States Coast Guard discovered approximately 4.7 tons of cocaine concealed inside a fuel tank aboard the Colombian F/V San Juanero, and 5 tons of cocaine were seized during the seizure of the Don Isaac and the two go-fast boats.

The crew detained aboard the F/V San Juanero are:

SALOMON CASTILLO,
MILTON GONGORA PINEDA,
FERNANDO ERAZO,
ADRIANO QINTERO RODRIGUEZ,
SILVIO CAMPAS,
CARLOS ALBERTO CARABALI GARCES,
DIDIER ADRIAN GOMEZ ESTUPINAN, and
SALOMON CUEVO SINISTERRA

The crews aboard the other vessels are:

ARTURO BENAVIDES MARTINEZ,
SANTOS VALENCIA MOSQUERA,
HERALD SEGUNDO MOSQUERA,
OSCAR RIVAS BARCO,
SILVIO MONTANO SANCHEZ,
JUAN PABLO FERRIN GARCES,
EMILIO SANCHEZ CIFUENTES,
SEVERINO PINILLO
RAUL ANTONIO SANCHEZ ALVARADO,
REYMUNDO CABRERA RUELAS,
MANUEL RAMIREZ GARZON,
MIGUEL ATILANO RAMAYO GARCIA,
JOSE GENARO FIGUEROA PLATA, and
JESUS LOPEZ RAMIREZ,

The crews from all the vessels will be prosecuted in accordance with United States law and the detainees were transported to Tampa, Florida for prosecution on charges of conspiring to possess with intent to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine while aboard vessels subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, as well as aiding and abetting in the possession with intent to distribute the cocaine while aboard the vessels. The charges carry a potential sentence ranging from a mandatory minimum of ten years' imprisonment up to life imprisonment. They made their first appearance in federal court today in Tampa before the Honorable Thomas B. McCoun.

These seizures mark the latest interdictions of drugs on the high seas related to the Tampa-based investigation, Operation Panama Express, which has totaled nearly 200 tons of cocaine. Participating in the joint investigation are: The United States Coast Guard (USCG), Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Maria Chapa Lopez and Anthony E. Porcelli of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force for the Middle District of Florida.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.

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